

Inspection of a good school: Archers Brook SEMH Residential School

Chester Road, Great Sutton, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire CH66 2NA

Inspection dates:

19 and 20 March 2024

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

All pupils at this school have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They all have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Parents, carers and pupils alike were keen to tell inspectors how happy they are to be part of this calm and welcoming community.

Pupils benefit from many opportunities to develop valuable social skills through structured activities, including at breaktimes. For example, they take great pride in caring for small animals and looking after the school's enticing outdoor areas. Pupils contribute well to their local community through volunteering work. They are proud of their successes in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Most pupils develop the confidence that they need to successfully transfer to their chosen college when they complete their compulsory education in Year 11.

Pupils typically maintain high standards of behaviour. This is particularly impressive as most pupils have previously struggled to access learning or to attend school regularly due to their SEND.

The school has high expectations of pupils' achievement. However, inconsistencies in how well the curriculum is delivered means that, at times, these aspirations are not realised. Pupils do not build on what they already know consistently well. They do not learn as successfully as they could, particularly in reading and mathematics.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school provides its pupils with an interesting and varied curriculum. There is a strong emphasis on helping pupils to overcome the barriers to learning that many of them face as a result of their SEND. Typically, the school makes clear what pupils are expected to

learn and the order that this learning should take place. This is particularly evident in key stages 2 and 3.

Despite the strengths in curriculum design, some teachers do not have the necessary subject-specific expertise to enable them to deliver the curriculum successfully. As a result, they do not identify and address gaps in pupils' knowledge consistently well before introducing new learning. Consequently, pupils do not build on what they already know as well as they should. This hinders how well some pupils achieve, particularly in key stage 4.

The school has recently introduced a new reading curriculum that incorporates a phonics programme. This is important because pupils often have weak reading knowledge when they join the school. Some pupils are responding to the new reading curriculum well. These pupils are developing fluency and accuracy when they read.

A lack of consistency, however, in how well staff deliver the phonics programme means that some pupils have fallen behind with their phonics knowledge. These pupils are not supported sufficiently well to catch up and, consequently, they find reading difficult because they struggle to decode unfamiliar words. This makes it harder for these pupils to access the rest of the curriculum or learn as well as they should.

The school identifies the additional needs of pupils well. Staff adhere to the school's agreed strategies to help pupils to manage their behaviour effectively. Learning is rarely disturbed as a result. Pupils are polite and respectful. They develop resilience as they progress through the school, which increases their ability to focus on learning.

Some pupils do not attend school as regularly as they should. However, many pupils' attendance improves considerably over time as a result of the effective support that the school provides.

The school places a high priority on pupils' wider development. Personal development and careers education are central to the curriculum. Pupils are well prepared for the challenges that they may face when they become adults. The school supports pupils well to explore and consider the different options open to them. Pupils develop positive attitudes that will help them to cope with the demands of employment, further education, or training.

Governors are well informed about the work of the school. The school makes sure that staff workload remains manageable, especially when new initiatives are being implemented.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school does not ensure that staff deliver its phonics programme consistently well. As a result, some pupils do not become accurate and fluent readers as quickly as they should. This hinders how well these pupils access the wider curriculum and impacts considerably on their achievement. The school should ensure that staff identify and address the gaps in pupils' phonics knowledge swiftly so that these pupils learn to read well.
- The school does not ensure that teachers check that pupils' knowledge is secure before introducing new learning. This means that some pupils do not build securely on what they already know. As a result, some pupils develop misconceptions and gaps in their learning. The school should ensure that teachers are suitably equipped to check that pupils have secured the prior knowledge necessary for subsequent learning.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in March 2018.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and

pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	111517
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	10269188
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	8 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	86
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Gavin Cass
Headteacher	Samantha Myers-Whittaker
Website	www.archersbrook.cheshire.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	13 and 14 March 2018 under section 5 of the Education Act 2015.

Information about this school

- The primary need for most pupils at this school is social, emotional and mental health.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision for pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- A new chair of governors has been appointed since the previous inspection.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's educational provision.
- This was the first routine inspection that the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors spoke with the headteacher and other leaders in the school. An inspector also spoke with members of the governing body, including the vice-chair of governors.
- An inspector listened to some pupils read.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics and music. They spoke with the leaders of these areas of the curriculum. They also visited lessons, looked at examples of pupils' work, held discussions with teachers and talked with pupils.
- An inspector also spoke with pupils about their learning in other subjects.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at breaktimes and lunchtimes. They observed pupils' behaviour as they moved around the school. An inspector also scrutinised leaders' records of pupils' behaviour.
- Inspectors spoke with groups of pupils about their experiences at school.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses. They also considered responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff and for pupils.
- An inspector spoke with parents as they brought their children to school.

Inspection team

Claire Cropper, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Ben Hill

His Majesty's Inspector

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